

# EPA FACT SHEET

## The National Ambient Air Monitoring Strategy

Over the past 30 years, the air pollution picture in the U.S. has changed significantly, as control programs have substantially reduced emissions of many pollutants, and as science has identified emerging issues of concern.

- With the exception of ozone and fine particulates (PM<sub>2.5</sub>), many existing monitoring sites are now registering levels well below the national ambient air quality standards for the criteria pollutants of sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, lead, and PM<sub>10</sub>. For example, monitored levels of lead have decreased 98% in the past 20 years, and levels of carbon monoxide have dropped 61 percent.
- Emerging health science, showing that fine particles are the source of serious health concerns, has caused us to refocus our regulatory programs.
- Recent information shows that air toxic pollutants are causing excess cancer incidents and other health effects.
- New technology to allow the “continuous” monitoring and mapping of air pollutants can be used to better inform the public about local air quality.

Over time, air monitoring networks have typically changed and evolved to address emerging air quality problems. To assure that our nation’s air monitoring programs can meet the current and future public, regulatory, and scientific needs of the twenty-first century, EPA is working closely with representatives from the State and Territorial Air Pollution Program Administrators /Association of Local Air Pollution Control Officials (STAPPA/ALAPCO) and Tribal environmental officials to develop a comprehensive strategy to meet current and future air monitoring needs. Now called the “National Monitoring Strategy,” the key elements are designed to:

- Ensure that state, local and tribal governments are monitoring for and using the best analytical technology for the pollutants of greatest concern according to the latest science. These include: fine particulate matter, longer-term exposures to ground-level ozone, and certain toxic air pollutants, like benzene and formaldehyde.
- Accelerate real-time reporting of air quality information to the public. Technological advances allow for “continuous” monitoring and hourly

reporting of air pollution levels across the country – this has led to real-time mapping and reporting the current day's air quality levels on the internet and media weather broadcasts.

- Expand the use of new technology to better analyze air pollution. Advanced technology allows air pollution control agencies to analyze the constituents of air pollution (not merely record the levels of the pollution). This helps state and local governments better target the sources of pollution when designing their air pollution control strategies, and it also helps scientists better evaluate the health effects of air pollution.
- Target the air quality monitoring to meet the concerns of local communities by providing the flexibility to allow state and local governments to adjust their monitoring networks according to local needs.
- Phase down parts of the network and track pollutants that are no longer a concern. In response to the significant reduction in certain air pollutants over the past three decades, the strategy would keep a smaller network in place to track these pollutants to ensure they do not become a problem again in the future.
- Establish a new national “core” network (NCore) to monitor multi-pollutant conditions in major metropolitan areas as well as rural areas.
- Make the best use of taxpayers dollars by more efficiently using available resources to target the air pollutants of concern and focusing to a greater degree on public health.

The development of this strategy is under the auspices of the National Monitoring Strategy Committee (NMSC), a partnership between EPA, STAPPA/ALAPCO, and Tribes. A document which fully describes the goals, objectives, and details of the National Monitoring Strategy will be available for review and public comment in September 2002. Comments will be due by November 22, 2002. The document will be available at the following link:

<http://www.epa.gov/ttn/amtic/stratmem.html>

For more information on the National Air Monitoring Strategy, please visit the US EPA website at:

<http://www.epa.gov/ttn/amtic/monitor.html>

or contact Rich Scheffe, 919/541-4650

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